



## **Opening Statement**

### **Senator John D. Rockefeller IV**

#### **Senate Finance Committee Hearing: The President's Budget for FY 2015**

**April 10, 2014**

Thank you, Secretary Sebelius, for being here this morning, and for your hard work leading HHS over the past five years.

Before I ask my first question, I want to speak briefly about the importance of sound health care spending to my home state of West Virginia.

The true value of health care became evident to me over 50 years ago, when I first arrived as a VISTA volunteer in the small coal mining town of Emmons, West Virginia.

The consequences of going without health coverage, especially early in life, can be insurmountable. I met children in Emmons who had never been to a dentist, and had no idea how lack of care could impact their lives going forward.

My time with these children taught me that health care is essential to having a healthy start in life, and a fair shot in adulthood.

That is why I worked to create the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Today, CHIP is the source of health care for over 37,000 West Virginians and over 8 million children and pregnant women nationwide, and it is tailored specifically to their health needs.

Unfortunately, the CHIP program loses its funding at the end of the budget year we are discussing today.

We must work together to keep that from happening.

While we can see well in advance the need to extend CHIP, not all public health crises come with a set timetable.

On January 9, when toxic chemicals leaked into the Elk River and compromised water for 300,000 West Virginians, we had a stark reminder about how important emergency response agencies are.

Our experience this year made clear that more, not less, funding is needed for public health agencies like the CDC.

These agencies need to be fully funded in order to support states, wherever and whenever a public health emergency arises.

While the Elk River chemical spill caught us off guard, another public health issue in West Virginia – black lung disease – has been apparent for decades.

Rather than see this ugly, heartbreaking disease recede into the past, we are seeing a resurgence of this disease, particularly among younger coal miners.

The importance of the Black Lung Clinic Grants Program, which serves over 8,400 West Virginians, and research aimed at preventing this disease, cannot be overstated.

Just like smallpox and polio of old, it's time to relegate Black Lung to the dustbin of history. This too requires a real and ongoing investment at the federal level.

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